

Cap'n Warren's Wards

By
JOSEPH C.
LINCOLN

Copyright, 1911, by D. Appleton & Co.

CHAPTER III—Continued.

"So? Want to know. Your husband dead, ma'am?"

"Yes," she answered shortly. "It looks as if it might snow, doesn't it?" she said, changing the subject.

"I shouldn't wonder. Have you any children, ma'am?"

"One—a son." The widow's tone was frigid.

"So? He must be a comfort to you. I s'pose likely he's a friend of my nephew and niece too."

"Certainly!"

There came the sound of laughter from the passage outside. The hall door opened. A moment later Caroline, followed by her brother and young Dunn, entered the library.

"Oh, Mrs. Dunn!" Caroline cried. "I'm so glad I accepted your—Mal-

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

colm's—invitation. We had a glorious ride! I—"

She stopped short. Captain Warren had risen from his chair and was facing her. Mrs. Dunn also rose.

"Caroline," she said nervously, "this—pausing on the word—"gentleman is here to see you. He says he is—"

The captain interrupted her. Stepping forward, he seized his niece's hands in his. "Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl, that I ain't seen since you was a little mite of a baby! Caroline, I'm your Uncle Elisha!"

"Good Lord!" groaned Stephen Warren.

"Well, well!" he exclaimed admiringly. "Bij's girl!"

CAP'N WARREN GETS A COLD RECEPTION AT THE HANDS OF HIS YOUNG WARDS

Atwood Graves, New York lawyer, goes to South Densboro, Cape Cod, to see Captain Elisha Warren. Caught in a terrific storm while on the way, he meets Cap'n Warren by accident and goes with the latter to his home. The lawyer informs Cap'n Warren that his brother, whom he had not seen for eighteen years, has died and named him as guardian of his two children, Caroline aged twenty, and Stephen, aged nineteen. The captain tells Graves he will go to New York and look over the situation before deciding whether he will accept the trust. The captain's arrival in New York causes consternation among his wards and their aristocratic friends.

Captain Elisha pulled thoughtfully at his beard.

"Humph!" he grunted. "Humph! Then I cal'late maybe— He took a step toward the door, stopped, turned back and said with calm decision: "I guess I'd better stay. You won't mind me, Caroline—you and Stephen. You mustn't. As I said, I ain't comp'ny. I'm one of the family, your pa's brother, and I've come some considerable ways to see you two young folks and talk with you. I've come because your pa asked me to. I'm used to roughin' it, been to sea a good many 'yages, and if a feather bed ain't handy I can get my forty winks on the floor. So that's settled, and you mustn't have me on your conscience. That's sense, ain't it, Mrs. Dunn?"

Mrs. Corcoran Dunn did not deign a reply. Caroline answered for her.

"Very well," she said coldly. Stepping to the desk she rang a bell. The butler appeared in the doorway.

"Edwards," said Miss Warren, "this gentleman," indicating the captain, "is to be our guest for the present. You may show him to his room—the blue room, I think. If it is not ready see that it is made so."

"Yes, Miss Caroline," replied Edwards. Retiring to the hall, he returned with the suit case.

"Will you wish to go to your room at once, sir?" he asked.

"Why, I guess I might as well, commodore," answered Captain Elisha, smiling. "Little soap and water won't do no harm. Fact is, I feel as if 'twas a prescription to be recommended. You needn't tote that valise, though," he added. "Tain't heavy, and I've lugged it so far already sence I got off the car that I feel kind of lonesome without it."

The butler, not knowing exactly how to answer, grinned sheepishly. Captain Elisha turned to Mrs. Dunn and her son.

"Well, good afternoon, ma'am," he said. "I'm real glad to have made your acquaintance. Yours, too, sir," with a nod toward Malcolm. "Your mother told me what a friend of the young folks you was and, as I'm sort of actin' pilot for 'em just now, in a way of speakin', any friend of theirs ought to be a friend of mine. Hope to see you often, Mr. Dunn."

The young man addressed smiled, with amusement not at all concealed, and languidly admitted that he was "charmed."

When the captain finally departed, preceded by Edwards and the suit case, Stephen Warren threw himself violently into a chair by the window. Young Dunn laughed aloud. His mother flashed an indignant glance at him and then hurried to Caroline.

"You poor dear!" she exclaimed, putting an arm about the girl's shoulder. "Don't mind us, please don't. Malcolm and I understand—that is, we know how you feel and—"

"Oh, but you don't know, Mrs. Dunn," cried Caroline, almost in tears. "You don't understand. It's so much worse than you think. I—I— Oh, why did father do it? How could he be so inconsiderate?"

"There, there!" purred the friend of the family. "You mustn't, you know. You really mustn't. Who is this man? This uncle? Where does he come from? Why does he force himself upon you in this way? I didn't know your poor father had a brother."

"Neither did we," growled Stephen savagely. Malcolm laughed again.

"What does it all mean, dear?" begged Mrs. Dunn. "You are in trouble, I'm sure. Don't you think we—"

"Well, Caroline," he said pleasantly. "I s'pose you've been expectin' me. Mr. Graves told you I was comin', didn't he?"

Miss Warren also was flushed with embarrassment and mortified surprise. "No," she stammered. "He has been ill."

"Sho, you don't say! So you didn't know I was comin' at all?"

"No. We—we have not heard from you since he returned."

"That's too bad. I hope I shan't put you out any, droppin' in on you this way. You mustn't treat me as comp'ny, you know. If 'tain't convenient, if your spare room ain't ready so soon after movin', or anything of that kind, I can go to a hotel somewhere for a day or so. Hadn't I better, don't you think?"

Caroline hesitated. If only they might have been spared this public humiliation! If the Duns had not been there! It was bad enough to have this dreadful country uncle come at all, but to have him come now, before they were prepared, before any explanations had been made! What should she do?

Her brother, fidgeting at her elbow, not daring to look at Malcolm Dunn, who he knew was thoroughly enjoying the scene, could stand it no longer.

"Caro," he snapped, "what are you waitin' for? Don't you know that the rooms are not ready? Of course they're not! We're sorry and all that, but Graves didn't tell us, and we aren't prepared. Certainly he'll have to go to the hotel for—for the present."

He ventured to raise his eyes and glare indignantly at the captain. Finding the latter looking intently at him he dropped them again and jammed his clenched fist into his pocket.

"What does it all mean, dear?"

Malcolm and I—might be able to help you? We should so love to do it. If you feel that you can confide in us, if it isn't a secret—"

She paused expectantly, patting the girl's shoulder. But Caroline had heard young Dunn's laugh and was of fended and hurt. Her eyes flashed as she answered.

"It's nothing," she said. "He has come to see us on a matter of business. I believe. I am nervous and—foolish, I suppose. Mr. Graves will see us soon, and then everything will be arranged. Thank you for calling, Mrs. Dunn, and for the ride."

It was a very plain hint, but Mrs. Dunn did not choose to understand it as such.

"You're sure you hadn't better tell me the whole story, dear?" she urged. "I am old enough almost to be your

mother, and perhaps my advice might—No? Very well. You know best, but—You understand that it is something other than mere curiosity which leads me to ask."

"Of course, I understand," said the girl hastily. "Thank you very much. Perhaps by and by I can tell you everything. But we must see Mr. Graves first. I—oh, don't ask me more now, Mrs. Dunn."

The widow of so astute a politician as Mike Dunn had been in his day could have scarcely failed to profit by his teachings. Moreover, she possessed talent of her own. With a final pat and a kiss she prepared for departure.

After the pair had been shown out by Edwards, on the way home in the car Mrs. Corcoran Dunn lectured her son severely.

"Have you no common sense?" she demanded. "Couldn't you see that the girl would have told me everything if you hadn't laughed like an idiot?"

The young man laughed again. "By Jove!" he exclaimed, "it was enough to make a wooden Indian laugh. The old jay with the barnacles telling us about the advantages of a sailor's life. And Steve's face! Ho, ho!"

His mother snorted disgust.

"Was it necessary to insult him the first time you and he exchanged a word?"

"Insult him? Him? Ha, ha! Do you imagine that a bayless like that would recognize an insult without an introduction? You don't intend putting him on your ceiling list, do you?"

"I intend cultivating him for the present."

"Cultivating him?"

"Yes—for the present. He is Rodgers Warren's brother. That lawyer, Graves, traveled miles to see him. What does that mean? That in some important way he is connected with the estate and those two children. If the estate is worth anything, and we have reason to believe it is, you and I must know it. If it isn't it is even more important that we should know before we waste more time. If Caroline is an heiress, if she inherits even a moderate fortune!"

She shrugged her shoulders by way of finish to the sentence.

When Captain Elisha emerged from his room after a wash and change of linen he found the library untenanted. He strolled about, his hands behind him, inspecting the pictures with critical interest. Caroline, dressed for dinner, found him thus engaged. He turned at the sound of her step.

"Why, hello!" he cried, with hearty enthusiasm. "All rigged up for inspection, ain't you?"

"Inspection?"

"Oh! that's just sailor's lingo. Means you've got your Sunday uniform on, that's all. My, My! How nice you look! But ain't black pretty old for such a young girl?"

"I am in mourning," replied his niece coldly.

"There, there! Of course you are. Tut, tut! How could I forget it. You see, I've been so many years feelin' as if I didn't have a brother that I've sort of got used to his bein' gone."

"I have not." Her eyes filled as she said it. The captain was greatly moved.

"I'm a blunderin' old fool, my dear," he said. "I beg your pardon. Do try to forgive me, won't you? And, perhaps—perhaps I can make up your loss to you just a little mite. I'd like to. I'll try to."

He laid a hand on her shoulder. She avoided him and, moving away, seated herself in a chair at the opposite side of the desk. The avoidance was so obvious as to be almost brutal. Captain Elisha looked very grave for an instant. Then he changed the subject.

After some further conversation, during which Caroline was plainly ill at ease, dinner was announced. When the captain in his quaint way described to Caroline and Steve how he found his way in New York Caroline was bored, and Steve was almost brutal with his interjections. For the hundredth time Caroline asked Steve what had prompted her father to make the captain their guardian.

After breakfast the next morning came the "business talk." It was a brief one. Captain Elisha soon discovered that his brother's children knew very little concerning their father's affairs. They had always plenty of money, had been indulged in practically every wish and had never had to think or plan for themselves. As to the size of the estate, they "new nothing more than Mr. Graves had told them, which was that, instead of the several millions which rumor had credited A. Rodgers Warren with possessing, \$500,000 would probably be the extent of their inheritance and that therefore they must live economically. As a first step in that direction they had given up their former home and moved to the apartment.

"Yes, yes," mused the captain; "I see. Mr. Graves didn't know about your movin', then? You did it on your own hook, so to speak?"

Stephen answered promptly. "Of course we did," he declared. "Why not?"

"No reason in the world. A good, sensible thing to do, I should say. Didn't anybody advise you where to go?"

"Why should we need advice?" Again

it was Stephen who replied: "We aren't kids. We're old enough to decide some things for ourselves, I should think."

"Yes; sartin. That's right. But I didn't know but p'raps some of your friends might have helped along. This Mrs. Dunn now, she kind of hinted to me that she'd—well, done what she could to make you comfortable."

"She has," avowed Caroline warmly. "Mrs. Dunn and Malcolm have proved their friendship in a thousand ways. We never can repay them, Stephen and I, never."

"No. There's some things you can't ever pay, I know that. Mrs. Dunn found this nice place for you, did she?"

"Why, yes. Mrs. Dunn knew that we had decided to move, and she has a cousin who is interested in New York property. She asked him, and he mentioned this apartment."

"One of his own, was it?"

"I believe so. Why are you so particular? Don't you like it?"

"Isn't it as good as those in—what do you call it—South Densboro?" Stephen asked maliciously.

Captain Elisha laughed heartily. "Pretty high as good," he said. "I didn't notice any better on the way to the depot as I drove up. What's the rent? You'll excuse my askin', things bein' as they are."

"Twenty-two hundred a year," answered his niece coldly.

The captain looked at her, whistled, broke off the whistle in the middle and did a little mental arithmetic.

"Twenty-two hundred a year!" he repeated. "That's one hundred and eighty odd a month. Say, that cousin of Mrs. Dunn's must want to get his investment back. You mean for just these ten rooms?"

Stephen laughed scornfully.

"Our guardian has been counting, Caro," he remarked.

"Yes. Yes, I counted this mornin' when I got up. I was interested naturally."

"Sure! Naturally, of course," sneered the boy. "Did you think the twenty-two hundred was the rent of the entire building?"

"Well, I didn't know. I—"

"The rent," interrupted Caroline with dignity, "was twenty-four hundred, but thanks to Mrs. Dunn, who explained to her cousin that we were friends of hers, it was reduced."

"We being in reduced circumstances," observed her brother in supreme disgust. "Pity the poor orphans! By gad!"

"That was real nice of Mrs. Dunn," declared Captain Elisha heartily. "About how much is she wuth, do you think?"

"I don't know. I never inquired."

"No. Well, down our way," with a chuckle, "we don't have to inquire. Ask

anybody you meet what his next door neighbor's wuth, and he'll tell you within a hundred, and how he got it, and how much he owes, and how he gets along with his wife. Ho, ho! Speakin' of wives, is this Mr. Dunn married?"

He looked at his niece as he asked the question. There was no reason why Caroline should blush. She knew it and hated herself for doing it.

"No," she answered resentfully; "he is not."

"Um-hm. What's his business?"

"He is connected with a Produce Exchange house, I believe."

"One of the firm?"

"I don't know. In New York we are not as well posted or as curious concerning our friends